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ABSTRACT

This Research Review mentions that, although few tests are designed specifically for junior colleges, 85 percent of junior college reading programs use standardized reading tests for diagnostic purposes. Many colleges require that students who score below a pre-determined level on college placement or reading exams be placed in developmental or remedial classes. Computers are often used to find students with reading difficulties and place them in appropriate classes. The range in reading ability in junior colleges is often ten or more levels. This spread in abilities and interests of students makes it necessary to have multi-level instruction in class. Each student is assigned a starting level and proceeds at his own rate through a reading-skill sequence. Because reading is an individualized matter, a uniform measure cannot be used to evaluate performance. Students should try to evaluate their own reading performance through the educational objectives set up for them. Special classes for deaf, illiterate, or adult students are usually restricted. The four standardized tests most often selected by junior college reading instructors are the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Iowa Silent Reading Test, California Reading Test, and Co-operative Reading Test. (CA)

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MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION IN JUNIOR COLLEGE READING PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

This issue of the *Junior College Research Review* should be of particular interest to the specialist in reading instruction. He might also like to see the series of Topical Papers issued by the Clearinghouse in May of this year. They were prepared in cooperation with James L. Laffey, Director of the Clearinghouse on Reading, who selected the experts in the field and solicited the manuscripts. Their titles are: *Directions for Research and Innovation in Junior College Reading Programs* (No. 18), *Skill Development in Junior College Reading Programs* (No. 20), *Community College Reading Center Facilities* (No. 21), *Exemplary Practices in Junior College Reading Instruction* (No. 23), and *Training Faculty for Junior College Reading Programs* (No. 24).

All of them can be purchased from the UCLA Students' Store – Mail Out, 308 Westwood Plaza, Los Angeles 90024. Ordering information for other documents can be found on page 4 of this *Review*.

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Measurement and Evaluation

Even though entrance examinations are not used to limit enrollment through cut-off numbers, they are used by college counseling departments for consultation and placement. External tests such as the CEEB Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing Program Examination (ACT) are either required or requested by seventy-nine per cent of the junior colleges included in a January 1970 survey [7]. The ACT was reported by fifty-seven per cent, the SAT by sixteen per cent, and other examinations by another six per cent. There was some overlap of the ACT and SAT and a few schools would accept either test. Seventeen per cent reported that no entrance examination was required; another five per cent did not respond to the question.

Over half the junior colleges require students who score below some pre-determined percentile on entrance examinations to take appropriate remedial work, including, in most instances, either developmental or remedial reading with whatever other courses may be recommended.

Eighty-five per cent of the junior college reading programs use a standardized reading test to find the student's approximate position on a norm. These norms and/or the grade-equivalents from the standardized tests are matched with levels of reading ability that have been developed according to a readability formula. With this information, reading teachers can place the student in a sequential reading program at a functional level.

Wall [17:12-16, 22] claims that the readability formulas tend to underestimate reading level and that reading tests tend to overestimate reading proficiency. Pauk [12:2-4, 11] suggests that available reading tests are artificial because the reading sections are heavily weighted toward literature irrelevant to the expository material the student will be required to read and because the vocabulary sections contain many esoteric words that the student will rarely see and seldom use. He also questions the time factor, which may penalize the intelligent but deliberate student, and recommends a realistic reading test that would eliminate the vocabulary portion and substitute a section to measure a student's ability to read textbook material. The word-difficulty levels and readability formulas fail to take into account the abstractness of the selection, the complexity of the sentence, and the student's level of reasoning ability.

The range in reading ability in the junior college is often ten or more grade levels, from grade four or five for some vocational and technical students to grade

fifteen or sixteen for a few bright academic students. Though many tests designed specifically for use in the first twelve grades are available, few are designed specifically for college use and fewer still for the junior college.

The Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Iowa Silent Reading Test, California Reading Test, and Co-operative Reading Test are the four most often selected by the junior college reading teacher. In *An Inquiry on Developmental Reading* [7], the Nelson-Denny Reading Test was mentioned far more frequently than any of the others. The Schrammel-Gray High School and College Reading Test, the Diagnostic Reading Test, and the Science Research Associates (SRA) Reading Record are used for placement, evaluation, and other special purposes. For example, the SRA Reading Record is especially good for older students with low reading abilities, since it provides subscores for such everyday acts as the reading of directories, maps, tablegraphs, advertisements, and indexes, for technical and general vocabulary, and for sentence meaning.

Only twenty-seven per cent of the reading teachers feel that the standardized test given at the beginning of a course is a measure of reading achievement. Sixty per cent consider it diagnostic.

Special reading classes for the foreign, deaf, illiterate, or adult student are usually restricted. They provide extra help and extra time for the handicapped student. For example, the range and complexity of sentence patterns was found by Restaino [13] to be an obstacle among deaf students, as were a limited vocabulary, lack of sound-sense, and an inability to handle verb tense. These and many other special problems are handled routinely in the special developmental reading classes.

A single junior college reading class often includes recent high school graduates, adults who have begun college training after a lapse of several years from schooling of any kind, community patrons taking developmental reading for self-improvement, vocational and technical trainees, and academically weak students who scored low on their entrance examination. This spread in abilities and interests makes a multi-level method of instruction and evaluation mandatory.

The reading teacher ordinarily assigns each student a starting level based on the grade-equivalent of the score made on the initial standardized test. The student is then individually programed and proceeds at his own rate through a reading skill sequence. Ironside [9] recommends that students be involved in the assessment of their reading status and progress. The teacher's assessment of test scores tends to become rigid and repetitive, and he is inclined to respond quickly and definitely to such single factors as a score, an incident, or some other particular aspect of reading. Because he is personally involved, the student can set realistic goals and conscientiously strive toward their attainment. A joint effort by the student and teacher in testing, interpreting test results, describing course objectives, setting starting levels for practice, assessing daily performance, and evaluating overall achievement in the course seems to work best.

Multi-level reading materials, such as those of the SRA Reading Laboratories, are used in nearly all developmental reading classes. Eighty-three per cent of the junior colleges that teach developmental reading report that some sort of multi-level device is used [7]. These laboratories generally require a minimum of teacher supervision and allow the student to evaluate himself. Daily progress charts act as stimuli to maintain high motivation, especially if the student shows continuous improvement.

In fifty per cent of the programs, the developmental reading teacher defines the factors that indicate satisfactory performance at a given reading level. The student is then allowed to change to practice levels of greater difficulty without consulting the teacher. This added responsibility emphasizes the virtue of self-evaluation. In other college reading programs, the student can change levels of difficulty only after receiving approval of the teacher. Without exception, college reading teachers report that they try to keep the student constantly evaluating his own reading performance.

Eighty per cent of junior colleges [1:85-91] give different forms of the same standardized test at the beginning and at the end of their developmental reading courses. In addition to these tests, half of them require a final examination on reading skills and vocabulary.

Sixty-seven per cent of the junior colleges report that the student's final grade in developmental reading is determined by a combination of teacher-made tests and scores on the standardized tests; sixteen per cent report using only a teacher-made test, and two per cent use just the scores on the standardized tests.

Blikre [4] reports that students who still score below the tenth percentile on a standardized reading test after taking one semester in developmental reading have little chance of completing a four-year college program. In his study, all the students scored below seventeen on the ACT. Another study at the University of South Dakota shows that ninety-five per cent of the students who score below seventeen on the ACT fail to earn a C grade average. Students who make extremely low scores on entrance examinations are not likely to be helped much by developmental reading, nor are they likely to be successful college students. Nevertheless, reading departments have observed significant change in the scores of students who have been retested after completing the developmental reading course.

Since reading is a highly individualized matter, and since each student competes, not with other members of his class, but only with himself, a uniform level of achievement cannot be used to measure performance in the junior college developmental reading course. Consequently, reasonable educational objectives must be set for each student and used as the criterion for the evaluation of his progress.

Most junior colleges require students who score below some predetermined percentile on entrance examinations to take appropriate remedial courses. The cut-off percentile varies among colleges, but is usually somewhere in the bottom quartile. For example, Blikre [4] reports that students who score between the tenth and thirtieth percentiles on the Schrammel-Gray Reading Test are required to take remedial reading. Kerstiens [10] reports that students who score below the fifty-sixth percentile on the Purdue Placement Test for English are assigned to a sequential make-up English program.

After the evaluation of a student's credentials, most schools have a counselor decide whether the student should be assigned to a remedial program. In some schools this is done by computer, which is programed to print out a list of students with low scores on entrance examinations and/or other placement tests. The list is referred to the appropriate departments, so that each student can be assigned to the recommended course in a remedial sequence. The computer is being used more and more as a tool for finding students with educational difficulties and channeling them into courses of study where their chances for success are good.

Though much is still to be done in the field of college remediation, it is now possible, with skillful diagnosis and remediation, to change a student's direction from probable college drop-out to probable college graduate.

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Hazel Horn, Editor

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